

# RECLAMATION

*Managing Water in the West*

## FINDING OF NO SIGNIFICANT IMPACT

# Gill Ranch Storage, LLC Long-Term Permits for Crossing Under the San Luis Canal and the San Luis Drain

**FONSI-09-166**

Recommended by:

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# Introduction

In accordance with section 102(2)(c) of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969, as amended, the South-Central California Area Office of the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation (Reclamation), has determined that the approval of two 50-year licenses to Gill Ranch, LLC (GRS) to cross under the San Luis Canal (SLC) and the San Luis Drain (SLD) for the installation of a 30-inch diameter natural gas pipeline will not significantly affect the quality of the human environment and an environmental impact statement is not required. This Finding of No Significant Impact is supported by Reclamation's Draft Environmental Assessment (EA) Number EA-09-166, *Gill Ranch, LLC Long-term Permits for Crossing Under the San Luis Canal and the San Luis Drain*, and is hereby incorporated by reference.

## Background

GRS and Pacific Gas and Electric Company (PG&E) has proposed the Gill Ranch Gas Storage Project (Project). The Project is designed to store 20 billion cubic feet of natural gas and deliver 650 million cubic feet per day of natural gas to the existing PG&E 401 Natural Gas Line in western Fresno County. Storage would be within the depleted reservoirs of the existing 5,020 acre Gill Ranch Gas Field, located near the town of Mendota, approximately 20 miles west of Fresno, California.

On July 29, 2008, GRS and PG&E filed applications (08-07-032 and 08-07-033) with the California Public Utility Commission (CPUC) for the Project. In November 2009, GRS applied to Reclamation for a license to cross Reclamation rights-of-way (ROW) at the SLC and the SLD.

The Proposed Action construction activities associated with the SLC would include 1,600 linear feet of horizontal direction drilling (HDD) to cross under the SLC. HDD would involve mud rotary drilling by a surface launched drilling rig to create a boring for placement of the pipeline. The top of the pipe would be a minimum of 25 feet below the centerline of the SLC and no surface alterations of the SLC would be required. Construction activities associated with the SLD would include installation by conventional jack and bore methods of 250 linear feet of gas pipeline under the SLD at approximately milepost 17. Jack and bore method excavation would be up to 8 feet deep. Pipeline construction ROW would measure up to 95 feet in width with a permanent ROW of 50 feet. The SLD would be returned to its present conditions once construction was complete.

Reclamation's finding that implementation of the Proposed Action will result in no significant impact to the quality of the human environment is supported by the following factors:

## FINDINGS

### Water Resources

Installation of the pipelines will be done via HDD for the SLC and a jack-and-bore method for the SLD. There will be no modifications to the SLC or the SLD from these construction

methods and the Proposed Action will not interfere with Reclamation's ability to deliver Central Valley Project water. Under some conditions, the migration of drilling fluid (usually a slurry of bentonite clay suspended in water) through subsurface materials can result in inadvertent return of drilling fluids to the surface (referred to as "frac-out") which could temporarily impact water quality. A Frac-out Contingency Plan will be implemented to prevent water quality impacts resulting from HDD. Therefore, there will be no significant impacts to water resources as a result of the Proposed Action.

### **Biological Resources**

Under the Proposed Action, some minor disturbances will occur in mostly disturbed areas. However, there is the potential to directly and indirectly impact migratory birds, the San Joaquin kit fox, and giant garter snake if they are present. Ground disturbing activity associated with the Proposed Action could scare off any wildlife that are nesting/breeding/aestivating or at refugia sites. Preconstruction surveys for migratory birds will be completed and appropriate avoidance, minimization, and protection measures would be followed in consultation with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service if active nests are located in the area of disturbance.

Direct take could occur to these species from strikes by heavy equipment or collision with construction vehicles. This effect is not likely to occur because construction work on the Proposed Action will be in areas with relatively high human use and activity. Wildlife could become trapped in open trenches or take up residence inside piping. Standard kit fox avoidance measures will be implemented, including speed limits on construction vehicles, which will minimize the chance of these special-status species being struck or entrapped.

The Proposed Action could harm or harass any giant garter snakes occurring in the area. During construction activities, a snake could become killed or injured during jack-and-bore method for the SLD. By implementing the guidelines presented in the GGS Programmatic, impacts to GGS will either be avoided or minimized.

There are also potential direct and indirect effects to special-status species caused by disturbance or a loss of habitat due to boring under the SLC and SLD. Sensitive resource areas will be identified before ground disturbance activities and construction will be limited to the Proposed Action ROW. In addition, any loss of habitat will be mitigated as described in the EA. Adverse impacts resulting from the Project have been addressed in the U.S. Army Corps Biological Opinion for the Project and any impacts resulting from Reclamation's Proposed Action will not have any impacts beyond those already addressed.

### **Cultural Resources**

The Proposed Action is administrative in nature and is the type of activity that has no potential to affect historic properties pursuant to the regulations at 36 CFR Part 800.3(a)(1).

### **Indian Trust Assets**

There is no potential to impact Indian Trust Assets (ITA) as there are none in the Proposed Action area. The nearest ITA is the Table Mountain Rancheria approximately 43 miles northeast of the Proposed Action area.

## **Land Use**

The Proposed Action includes the installation of a natural gas pipeline beneath the SLC and SLD. Neither installations will impair the ability of Reclamation or the California Department of Water Resources to deliver water to their contractors nor will it change land use designations in the area. Therefore, there will be no significant impact to land uses due to the Proposed Action area.

## **Socioeconomic Resources**

The Proposed Action will consist of eight days of pipeline installation and would not impact socioeconomic resources within the Proposed Action area. Therefore, there will be no significant impacts to socioeconomics as a result of the Proposed Action.

## **Environmental Justice**

The Proposed Action will not cause dislocation, changes in employment, or increase flood, drought, or disease nor will it disproportionately impact economically disadvantaged or minority populations. Therefore, there will be no significant impacts to Environmental Justice due to the Proposed Action.

## **Air Quality**

Construction emissions of nitrous oxide, sulfur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and particulate matter were calculated by CPUC for the entire Project utilizing the AERMOD model. Results from the modeling indicate that the Project emissions will not exceed State or Federal air quality standards. As part of the construction activities, the installation of the gas pipeline beneath the SLC and SLD fall well below the State and Federal emission standards. Additionally, CPUC in coordination with the SJVAPCD has implemented mitigation measures for the entire Project that will reduce air quality impacts, such as fugitive dust and vehicle emissions. Therefore, there will be no significant impacts to air quality as a result of the Proposed Action.

## **Global Climate Change**

The impact that Greenhouse gases (GHG) emissions have on global climate change is not dependent on whether they were generated by stationary, mobile, or area sources, or whether they were generated in one region or another. Implementation of the Proposed Action will be expected to result in a slight temporary net increase in GHG emissions associated with short-term construction activities. While any increase in GHG emissions will add to the global inventory of gases that will contribute to global climate change, the Proposed Action will result in only a very slight increase in GHG emissions from temporary or existing sources. Therefore, there will be no significant impacts to global climate change.

## **Cumulative Impacts**

CPUC compiled a list of 28 proposed projects within the general vicinity of the Proposed Action including 12 in the County of Fresno, 5 in the City of Kerman, 4 in the City of Firebaugh, and 1 in the City of Mendota most of which have been approved. Proposed activities include: construction of retail spaces, commercial tracts, residential lots, power facilities, motels, exploratory wells, and pipelines. It is possible that the Proposed Action could be done at the same time as several of these proposed projects although it is unlikely that all of the projects will be done simultaneously. The Proposed Action consists of installation of a natural gas pipeline

that will take up to eight days to complete. This action may produce cumulative impacts to air quality from construction emissions and fugitive dust as well as potential soil erosion from earth disturbing activities. CPUC has instigated a mitigation monitoring program to minimize soil erosion and air quality impacts. There will be a slight increase in GHG emissions which will contribute to global cumulative impacts of GHG; however, these impacts will be temporary and will also be minimized by CPUC's mitigation measures and the environmental commitments incorporated into the Proposed Action. Overall there will be no adverse cumulative impacts caused by the Proposed Action.